

Socialist **Worker**

ASSEMBLY ELECTION SPECIAL

DON'T PAY THE WATER CHARGES

The government are trying to scare people into paying the water charges bill.

Estimates for the bills have arrived in the past couple of weeks.

It is vital that no one signs up to direct debits or to any other payment scheme. A mass non-payment movement is developing which will defeat these charges.

The average bill of around

£100 is set to rise over the next two years to three times that figure.

That means every household will end up paying between £300 and £400 for the water service.

Once they have the charges in place the bills will skyrocket and the 'affordability tariff' for pensioners and those on low incomes will end.

Everyone knows we are be-

ing ripped-off.

We already pay for water through our regional rates and these charges amount to nothing more than forcing us to pay twice.

We need to fight the bills because not only is this a double tax but it opens the door for privatisation.

The only reason for the separate charges is to create a "revenue stream" so that our water

can be handed over to one of the half a dozen multinationals that control privatised water services in other countries.

Privatisation will mean a less efficient service, job losses and price rises.

That's what it has meant in England and Wales where many families now find themselves in debt to the water companies.

It is time to raise the temperature on the government.

We need to build a mass campaign of non-payment to beat this double tax.

The Poll Tax was beaten in the UK by a campaign of mass non-payment and the campaign against the Water Charges in Dublin stopped the introduction of charges there.

By sticking together, by refusing to pay, we can force them to find the money elsewhere.

VOTE FOR NON-PAYMENT CANDIDATES



Seán Mitchell

(West Belfast: People Before Profit)

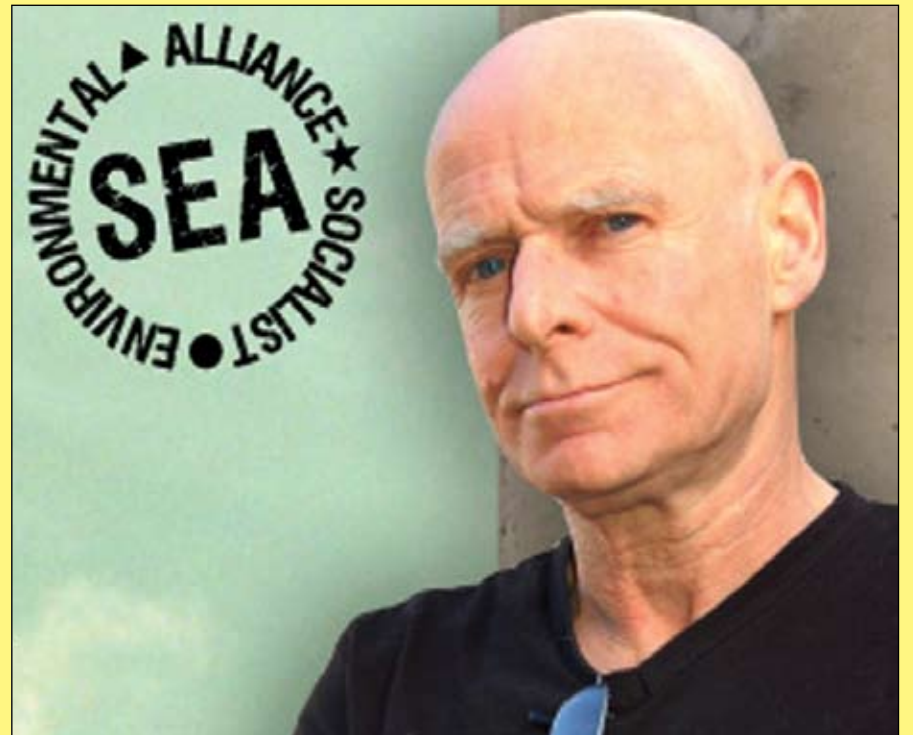
Seán Mitchell is a well known activist in Belfast. At nineteen, he will be the youngest ever candidate to stand for the Assembly in Northern Ireland.

He is currently on the steering committee of the Belfast Anti War Movement, where alongside others, he has organised numerous rallies and events. As one of the organisers of Student's Against Poverty he helped bring a contingent of 150 people over to Edinburgh to take part in the huge Make Poverty History Demonstration in 2005.

He is on QUB Student Council where he has argued against Bush and Blair's phoney war on terror

and the demonisation of Muslims. He is in favour of an active campaign against the introduction of top up fees. He is a member of Socialist Worker Student Society and has worked alongside the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Committee and the campaign to support the Rosspoint 5.

In early 2006, during the strike by postal workers against their bullying bosses, Sean organised a collection for their strike fund at the university. He is currently working alongside community workers to build a campaign of mass non-payment of the water charges and is a member of Communities Against Water Tax.



Eamonn McCann

(Foyle: Socialist Environmental Alliance)

Eamonn McCann, 63, has been active in socialist politics since the anti-Vietnam war movement of the 1960s and 70s.

He is now a leading campaigner against the occupation of Iraq and the oppression of Palestine. He was a strong socialist voice in the civil rights movement and continues to take a stand against the abuse of State power.

He is the chairman of the Bloody Sunday Trust and of the Derry and NW Branch of the National Union of Journalists and Vice Chairman of the Derry Trade Union Council.

He is a member of the Socialist Workers Party and one of the Raytheon Nine.

He is the father of Kitty, Luke and Matty and grandfather of Roisin and lives in Derry with his partner Goretti Horgan.

OTHER NON-PAYMENT CANDIDATES

Jim Barbour, Socialist Party, South Belfast

Tommy Black, Socialist Party, East Belfast

Harry Hutchinson, Don't Pay Water Tax Campaigner, Mid Ulster

Victor Christie, Don't Pay Water Tax Campaigner, East Derry.

Derry meeting sets Non-Payment Campaign on fire



200 crowd into Derry City Hotel to hear about the non-payment campaign

200 people attended an angry meeting on water charges in Derry's City Hotel on Thursday 15th February. The packed meeting was told by John Corey, the general secretary of NIPSA, Northern Ireland's biggest public sector union, that the trade union movement was fully behind the non-payment campaign.

Corey said, "The trade union movement is committed to stand and fight on this issue. We have printed 750,000 leaflets that will be delivered to every house in Northern Ireland calling for people to refuse to pay this water tax." Corey continued, "People should voice their opposition to these charges in the upcoming election. Every politician should be asked where they stand, and people should vote for candidates who are calling for non-payment of this double tax."

Eamonn McCann, candidate for the Socialist Environmental Alliance in the Assembly elections and a

leader of the Communities Against the Water Tax, also addressed the meeting. He said, "This is an eminently winnable campaign. The attendance at this meeting proves the strength of feeling on this issue."

The government is treating us like idiots. On the one hand they claim to want to consult us and have asked for submissions on the issue of water charges to be given to them before March 5th.

On the other hand people have already received estimates for their bills through their doors in the last week. This shows the only message they will listen to is a mass campaign of non-payment of water charges."

McCann continued, "Some parties are trying to undermine the campaign by saying it will be a repeat of the rent and rates strike in the 70s, where people were left badly in the lurch. But it was those same parties that left us in the lurch. Some of them even joined

the courts in pursuing non-payers. The anti-water tax campaign will be different. We won't leave anyone in the lurch. This campaign has the backing of the trade union movement - the biggest organisation in Northern Ireland. The rent and rates strike never had that.

This campaign will organise across both communities. The rent

strike affected one community - and a minority of that community at that. There was only 26,000 at its height.

The anti-water tax campaign will be a mass movement. This campaign has prepared the ground and is also organised democratically through mass meetings like tonight."

A woman in the audience said, "The best guarantee against the courts and to stop these charges is to build a massive campaign. People shouldn't be frightened by legal threats. Instead we should go from this meeting and make sure our neighbours and friends don't pay and join the campaign."

One man from the audience who used to live in Wales said, "Water charges in England and Wales continue to rise year on year. My brother now pays over £400 a year."

We should not be afraid of resisting the charges even through the courts. The potential legal costs are tiny compared to what we might be paying every year if we don't stop them. They won't be able to bring us all to court."

Over one hundred people signed up to help organise the campaign in their area. There are now local meetings planned in every estate in Derry over the coming weeks.

COMING TO YOU – THE NON-PAYMENT CAMPAIGN

There will be Communities against the Water Tax meetings in your local area over the coming weeks.

There will be a central meeting in Belfast at Grosvenor House (Glengall Street – opposite the Europa Bus station) on Tuesday 27th of February, starting at 7.30pm.

The speakers will be John Corey from NIPSA and Manus Maguire from CAWT.

If you want a meeting in your area phone the CAWT on 07949749781

How do we oppose the water charges?

On a recent politics show, Sinn Fein spokesperson Mitchell McLoughlin was asked a straight question: 'Would his party urge their supporters not to pay their water charges bills?'

And he gave a straight answer. His party did NOT favour this tactic and instead urged people to vote for them so that they could oppose the measure in the Assembly.

The interviewer appeared to be taken aback and joked 'So this is the new compliant Sinn Fein?'

Strangely enough, Sinn Fein is at one with the DUP on this particular issue

Both parties are verbally

opposed to the charges but do not support a campaign of non-payment.

In the case of the DUP, it has always been a right wing party, so it is hardly surprising they tell people to 'respect the law'.

In the case of Sinn Fein, they have moved from being a revolutionary nationalist party to playing by the rules of the conventional game.

One of those rules is that you do not urge people to break the law but instead argue that people should express opposition through voting.

There are two serious problems

with this approach.

The first is that Sinn Fein and the DUP have no strategy for when the British government say they have to work within the budget they are given.

The actual financial arrangements for the Northern Assembly will be set in place before it meets – and neither Sinn Fein nor the DUP have spelled out how they will block the charges then.

The second problem is that non-payment has been shown to work.

Why is there no poll tax in Britain today?

It was because of a mass non-payment campaign.

When people were hauled before the courts, their supporters gathered outside and showed how 'people power' could frighten our rulers.

Maggie Thatcher claimed she was an Iron Maiden who could break any protest movement.

But the protest movement broke Maggie Thatcher and she was forced to resign as Prime Minister

Why are there no water charges in the Republic of Ireland?

Once again it was because there was a mass non-payment campaign.

Hundreds of people turned up to meetings in local working

class estates and voted democratically not to pay the charges.

When the local councils sent in contractors to turn off the water they were either driven out of the estates or teams of plumbers who belonged to the non-payment campaign re-connected people.

The moderate Irish Labour Party took the same position as Sinn Fein and DUP – that while they were opposed to charges, they could not support a non-payment campaign.

If they had been listened to, their would be water charges in the Republic of Ireland today.

Bush's bloody war expands

Most people wonder if the war in Iraq can get much worse. With over 600,000 civilian deaths, daily atrocities waged by sectarian militia and the destruction of Iraq's infrastructure how much worse could it get.

The recent decision by George Bush to ignore the advice of elder statesmen in the US establishment and escalate the "war on terror" has set the scene for even greater carnage.

The US is currently planning to start trying to "clear out" the Shia militia from Sadr City, a Baghdad suburb with a population of two million. One US expert predicted "Mogadishu times ten", referring to the US's bloody 1992 attack on Somalia.

Even General Petraeus, the new US commanding officer in Iraq, couldn't muster much optimism, commenting feebly that "the situation is not hopeless".

Turning on the Shia can only deepen sectarian divisions and it is bound to strengthen resistance to the presence of British troops in the mainly Shia south of the country.

If Iraq wasn't bad enough, fighting is set to flare up in Afghanistan in the next few weeks as the snows clear and the geographical scope of the "war on terror" widens.

Most worrying of all, the neo-conservatives who surround Bush are trying to soften up public opinion for an attack on Iran by blaming Iranian militants for their failure in Iraq.

It is tempting to think that George Bush is either simple, mad or both. But in fact there is a kind of barbaric logic at work here. Bush's obstinacy shows that he means it when he talks about a "long war".

The attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq were not just disastrous responses to 9/11, but part of a wider imperial project—a project driven by insecurity rather than hyper-power confidence.

Competition

As the Observer put it last Sunday, "The times they are a-changing for the US elites. Washington is



Bush is purging another 21,500 troops into Iraq

no longer the capital of an unchallenged economic superpower. It faces real and growing competition from China, Europe and a newly confident Russia."

These are the trends Bush and the neo-conservatives are trying to buck—and in these circumstances the US establishment needs to look ruthless rather than weak.

Reducing troop numbers amid

the carnage in Iraq would signal weakness.

So instead Bush is tempted to look for a killer blow that can restore the authority of the US and its president.

In 1970, then US president Richard Nixon ordered the murderous carpet bombing of Laos and Cambodia just at the moment when the government was privately admit-

ting defeat in Vietnam.

Hatred of Bush is now so widespread that any escalation is likely to make matters worse.

As one poll stated recently, "The more the US flexes its hard power—the more it deploys troops abroad or talks tough diplomatically—the more it seems to weaken its ability to influence the world."

PEOPLE POWER CAN DEFEAT BUSH

A recent opinion poll showed three quarters of the world's population now think Bush's Middle East policy is a disaster.

The US anti-war movement responded to Bush's "surge" announcement by turning out half a million people in Washington DC last month.

This was the US's biggest anti-war demo since the invasion of Iraq. American activists are reporting a spirit of popular dissent like that of February 2003.

The Irish Anti-War Movement is also gearing up for a major demonstration in Dublin on March 24th outside the Fianna Fail party Ard Fheis.

Protestors will focus on why the Irish government has allowed US troops to use Shannon airport and are determined to make it be an prominence issue in the upcoming elections there.

They are demanding that every candidate sign a pledge not to support any government that allows US troops to use Shannon.

Here in Northern Ireland, the same government which tells us that it has no money to invest in our schools or hospitals has squandered over £8 billion to conduct the occupation.

Blair shuttles back and forth to Belfast to preach to us about 'peace,' but his government has been forced to admit that both Derry City and Aldergrove airports have been used for 'extraordinary renditions' to transport individuals fingered by the Bush administration for torture abroad.

This hypocrisy shows that anyone who is opposed to Bush war should get fully behind nine anti-war activists from Derry facing serious charges for trying to disrupt the war machine.

DROP THE CHARGES AGAINST THE RAYTHEON NINE

On August 9th last anti war activists occupied the Raytheon offices in Derry. They wanted to 'de-commission' an arms making facility that had been involved in the murder of scores of civilians.

During last summer's attack on Lebanon, 100 extra Raytheon guided Bomb Units were rushed by US military transport planes to Israel, stopping to re-fuel at Prestwick airport.

These 'bunker buster' bombs were used in attacks on civilian areas of South Beirut and in the murder of 51 men, women and children in the village of Qana.

The 100,000 cluster bombs which were dropped in the last three days of the war were also manufactured by Raytheon.

The Raytheon Nine who were part of a larger anti-war protest that occupied the factory wanted to save human lives.

They had been listening to the horrific media reports of what was happening in Lebanon and decided to act.

The protestors wanted to take action to save human life and so they attempted to de-commission a military facility.

The nine activists were arrested and face trial in the coming months before the notorious Diplock courts.

The Derry anti war coalition is waging a campaign to get the charges against the Raytheon 9



The Raytheon Nine

dropped.

In a statement made recently the Derry Anti War Coalition said: "People can see the double standards of making it a criminal offence to occupy a factory in

Derry, while the people behind the occupation of Iraq go scot-free. The Raytheon company is currently supplying weapons for use in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine.

"We say that trying to stop

war crimes shouldn't be a crime. Already, international figures like Noam Chomsky, Tony Benn and Mark Thomas have called for the charges against the nine to be dropped."

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO OPPOSE BUSH'S WAR

■ Ask everybody standing in the election for the assembly three simple questions:

- ☐ Are they opposed to Bush and Blair's war?
- ☐ What practical steps will they take to stop that war?
- ☐ If they support de-commissioning are they for closing down the Raytheon plant in Derry?

■ Support the Raytheon Nine. Order leaflets and material from the campaign by checking out the website Raytheon9.org.

■ Join the anti-war protests in March 24th. Contact Belfast Anti-War Movement on 07837507935.

NO TO NUCLEAR POWER

Scientists are 90 per cent certain that human activity is causing the planet's temperature to rise. The most recent Climate Change report has pointed to carbon dioxide emissions as the main culprit. Some politicians are using the issue to raise the question of nuclear power.

But nuclear power is simply not a safe, clean and efficient answer to climate change.

It is often said that if the use of nuclear power was doubled, to produce around half of the electricity we use, then emissions would fall by 8 percent. But this calculation assumes that nuclear power produces no carbon dioxide emissions.

It is simply untrue. The mining and transport of uranium, the making of nuclear fuel rods, the building of nuclear power plants, and the storage and processing of nuclear waste all lead to carbon dioxide emissions.

The most authoritative study for the UK suggests that nuclear power would produce about 50 percent more global warming emissions than wind power. Not only will the use of nuclear power not solve the immediate problem of carbon emissions, but it leaves serious problems for generations to come.

Producing electricity from nuclear power results in huge amounts of waste, and there is no agreed solution for the safe storage of that waste. An inventory in 2001 recorded 1.75 million cubic metres of nuclear waste



Nuclear power leaves serious problems for generations to come.

in the UK, most of which has arisen from civil nuclear power and reprocessing. Most of this waste will require treatment before it can be stored safely, yet 85 percent is currently stored in a raw or partly treated state.

Reprocessing of spent fuel from nuclear reactors, at Sellafield, leads to emissions of radioactive forms of hydrogen, sulphur and krypton being

released into the air. It causes releases of radioactive technetium into the Irish Sea.

Nuclear power is no answer to the real and very serious problems of Global Warming and climate change. Commitment to renewable forms of energy would be far more productive and a safer option than the nuclear fixation put forward by Tony Blair.

Don't let them shut the schools

The British Government are carrying out a 'consultation process' around education. They have produced a website to encourage 'stakeholders' to comment on their proposals. But as with water charges, they will ignore the views of our and inflict market driven reforms on us all.

There are three elements to reforms of education: 1) Selection - what replaces the 11 plus, 2) The Bain report - school closures and mergers, and 3) PFI - the privatisation of school buildings.

The 11 plus is going but instead of bringing in a more comprehensive system, the Government have suggested that selection will be left up to the Assembly. This was a device for getting the DUP to sign up to the St Andrews agreement.

If there is no agreement in the Assembly - and that is the most likely outcome - then individual schools could set their own admissions criteria.

This will be even more divisive than the 11 plus and brings in a larger degree of competition in a situation of falling pupil numbers.

The Bain report indicates that nearly one third of schools across Northern Ireland face closure or merger.

This means that 440

schools and hundreds of jobs are under immediate threat. This could have a devastating impact. Schools should be kept open and utilised as facilities for young people in the evening. Instead the Government wants to sell off school land to property developers.

In the consultation report, Blair's Government is very coy about the use of private schemes - PFI - to build new schools. They have every reason to be. One of their flagships, Balmoral High School, has been a disaster. Built in 1996 to accommodate 500 pupils, this year only 9 pupils enrolled in this post-primary school. Yes, that's nine. Clearly it will be closed. Yet the consortium that built it will be paid for a total of 25 years to provide facilities for 500 non-existing pupils. This market driven reform is a wasteful use of public money and much less efficient than keeping buildings within the public sector.

The education system here needs reform - and that means:

- comprehensive education where the skills of all children are valued.
- schools kept open as community resources where numbers have dropped,
- smaller pupil-teacher ratios.

Will the PSNI reduce crime?

"We need to deal with the hoods" is a common call and the Andersonstown News is full of articles about the scourge of youth gangs. Anti social behaviour has become a big political issue in West Belfast.

However, the official figures suggest that anti-social crime is on the way down. This may be an under-estimate because many crimes are not reported to the PSNI. But the figures still suggest that we need to distinguish between the law and order rhetoric of politicians and the actual reality.

The real issue is how do we deal with crime? Sinn Fein believe that the best way is to encourage people to join the PSNI - but socialists disagree.

One problem is that the clear-up rates of the PSNI are very low by any standards. In some cases, it is a mere ten per cent of crimes reported to them.

And it is hardly the job of the police to sort out gangs of teenagers.

Slapping ASBO's on anyone guilty of the smallest misdemeanours is not a recipe for solving the problem. It merely widens the net of criminality and ignores the social reasons why such problems exist.

Writing in the Irish News a few years ago, Bridget Gadd - who through her work in the Probation Service has probably met more offenders than most - made the following point.



We need to find social solutions to social problems.

"It is clear that punishing the miscreants alone does not solve the problem ... punishments that included not just imprisonment but also serious physical assaults from paramilitaries ...

"Surely it is not too much to ask that as a society we should try to understand why some young people, particularly from some areas of West Belfast, are set on such disastrous paths, where not even the threat of physical mutilation will stop them in their tracks."

We need to tackle the causes of economic deprivation rather than just deviant individuals.

We need to find social solutions to social problems.

That means substantial public investment in areas like West Belfast to create jobs and end poverty.

Meanwhile, we should remain vigilant and ensure that the boot boy tactics of the PSNI are not used against the youth of West Belfast and elsewhere.

The growing housing crisis

House prices here rose by 36% last year, faster than anywhere in Europe.

It is being driven by a severe shortage of public housing.

It is also driven by speculators who buy up properties and leave them empty, creating a shortage of homes.

The average price of a home in Northern Ireland is now at £200,000, way beyond the reach of most working people.

Where people do manage to buy a home, it is a constant battle each month to be able to make the mortgage repayments. In many cases it is a struggle that ends in misery, with people losing their homes.

In the last five years, repossessions of homes rose by 60% in Northern Ireland.

In total, 2,600 homes were repossessed in 2006.

In many cases these were family homes and a large number of people were made homeless as a result.

Northern Ireland has one of the highest levels of homelessness in Europe.

It is over double the level of

that in England.

Last year over 20,000 people in Northern Ireland became homeless.

Despite this, the supply of social housing is decreasing and people are being left to the mercy of the speculators.

The Housing Executive has built no new houses in the past two years.

Housing Associations who are now tasked to provide social housing built only 700 homes across the whole of Northern Ireland last year.

There are currently 30,000 houses lying empty in Northern Ireland.

The solution to the problem lies in two directions.

■ Firstly, there needs to be a massive increase in the amount of social housing being built here.

■ Secondly, in order to stop property speculation, there should be severe penalties imposed on anyone who owns a property that has been left lying empty for more than three months.

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

Capitalism is wrecking the lives of millions and endangering the planet.

A new society can only be constructed when the workers take control of the wealth and plan its production and distribution for human need and not profit.

REVOLUTION

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed. The courts, the army and police exist to defend the interests of the wealthy.

To destroy capitalism, we need to remove the present state structures and create a workers' state based on much

greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

War is a constant feature of capitalism today as the imperialist powers try to dominate the earth.

Bush's "War on Terrorism" is a crude device to attack any country which threatens US military, strategic or economic dominance.

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

We oppose all forms of oppression and racism. This divides and weakens the

working class.

We are for full social, economic and political equality for women.

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

We stand for workers unity against the Assembly politicians and Blair government.

Like great socialist James Connolly, we believe that partition has brought about a 'carnival of reaction'

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To win socialism socialists need to organise in a revolutionary party.

This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system.

We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.

We stand for fighting trade unions and for independent rank and file action.

Join the Socialists

Fill in the form and send to

SWP PO Box 1648 Dublin 8

Name.....

Address.....

Email.....

Phone.....

